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THE DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS.

ACCORDING to official statements there are at present in the Protestant theological seminaries of the United States approximately two hundred fewer men than last year. While this loss will be somewhat lessened when the enrolment of the entire year can be stated, there can be no doubt that the number of students in the seminaries has considerably decreased. This decrease is not confined to any single denomination, but is pretty evenly distributed, although the Presbyterian schools seem to have suffered most. It is impossible to reach exact figures as to the number of undergraduate students preparing for the ministry, but there seems to be less decrease in their numbers the country through, though not in the colleges of the East. Speaking generally, therefore, the shrinkage seems not to be confined to men making special preparation for the work of the ministry, but is most marked among them.

The causes for this situation are not so simple as might at first be supposed. One thing at least is true. Men are not being kept from the seminaries because of their fear of "higher criticism." Indeed, one might almost infer from the statistics that the loss of students was in some sort of ratio to the so-called "soundness" of an institution. The progressive seminaries as a rule suffer less than others, if, indeed, they do not report an actual increase in attendance. Indeed, so far from freedom of

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investigation being injurious to the ministry, many intelligent young men honestly—let us hope mistakenly—fear lest in entering the ministry they will lose liberty of thought and be forced into a conformity as dangerous to their conscience as necessary for their peace.

Be this as it may, the danger confronts the church of failing to share in the thought and social ethics of the age because of imperfectly disciplined leaders. The number of men entering the ministry through the theological seminary is probably far less than that of the men entering the ministry, or at least professional religious work, through other channels. Not to mention the comparatively few men who enter the ministry through the training schools of the Young Men's Christian Association, it will be enough to call attention to the following facts which make against the growth of theological seminaries:

1. Many small colleges have a theological chair or department. In too many cases such instruction, of necessity scanty, is regarded by the student for the ministry as sufficient for all practical purposes. If such studies were taken after the completion of his college course, the minister would be none too well prepared, but, as a matter of fact, they are generally substituted for academic courses, and the student goes into the ministry possessed of neither a thorough collegiate nor a theological education. How widespread this practice has become can be realized only after a study of the curricula of western and southern colleges.

2. Many men are entering the ministry through training schools—schools for lay workers, missionary training schools, and the like. There is an undoubted demand for institutions doing their grade of work, and it is not our purpose to criticise the instruction given in them, although in many cases it appears to us that it is opposed to the best interests of the kingdom of God. It is enough to call attention to the fact that it is uncommon for their students to have had a collegiate education; indeed, they have not had even a high-school course. Nor do men who have been in attendance upon them often carry further their theological

studies, although there are many theological seminaries which stand ready to welcome them. That such ill-trained men accomplish much good is unquestionable, but it is impossible to regard them as fitted for the leadership of churches. Standing too generally as the champions of crude theology and misleading interpretation of the Bible, notably of the prophecies, they inevitably tend to divorce the church from the intellectual forces of their communities.

3. There are many men ordained by churches of the congregational order of church polity who, though doubtless pious and zealous, are utterly untrained. They are to be found chiefly in regions which for some reason or other deem it impossible to get educated pastors. In many cases these men are eager to study, but because of poverty believe it impossible to attend any theological school, however near or inexpensive.

Here, then, is the situation: Thousands of men are going into professional religious life, many of them sooner or later into the ministry, untrained or ill-trained, and at the same time the number of properly trained men seems decreasing. Cannot the churches be aroused to the danger of this situation? Grant—as undoubtedly is the case—that the decrease is partly, even largely, due to the higher demands made by the seminaries, and that therefore theological students as a class are improving in quality, is the situation much improved? The fact still remains that the ministry is being recruited from the ranks of men not as well educated as are many persons among their congregations, unfitted to cope with the pressing problems confronting organized Christianity. Are ministers sending their own sons into the ministry? Do churches urge bright young men among their members to consider the ministry as a life-work? Do parents even *want* their Christian boys to be ministers? Whatever the reason for the decrease in seminary attendance—*what shall be done?*

One thing certainly. Ministers must lay the matter upon the consciences of parents and young men who are being educated. There never was a time when the ministry had a grander

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opportunity or when it could accomplish more important results. It offers no easy road, but what young man of spirit wants an easy road? It does offer an opportunity for service to man and society, and what more should a Christian student ask? It is folly to say that every man should enter the ministry, but it is also folly to believe that an earnest, educated, Christian young man can serve the church best as "a layman making money for the Lord." Let us have done with such pious frauds and look the matter squarely in the face. The church needs, and for its best efficiency must have immediately, a multitude of able and well-trained men. It is a turning-point in religious history. Will Christian people of culture and wealth, as well as those of sobriety and poverty, once more take up the prayer that the Lord will send laborers into his vineyard—and *see that they go?*